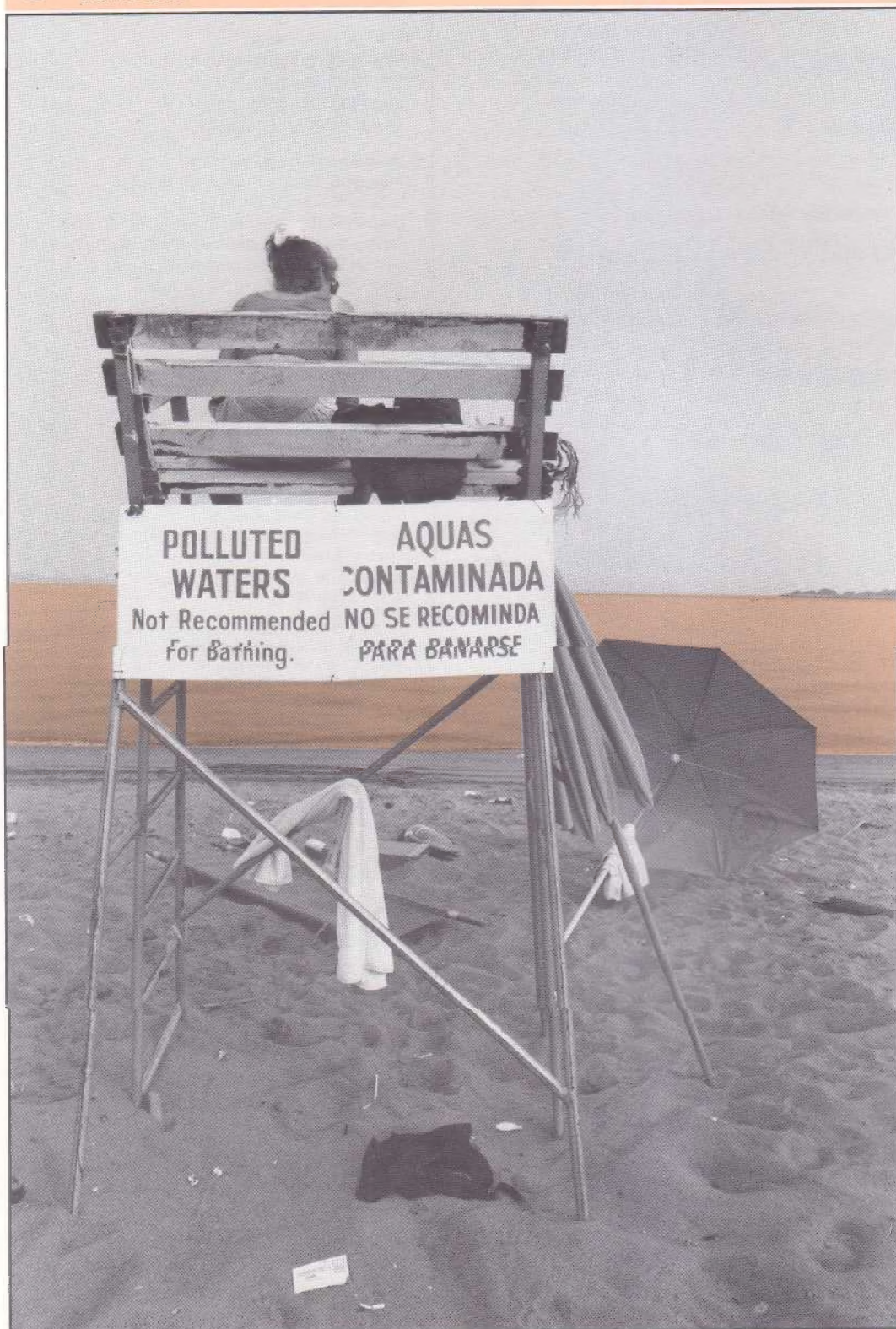


Lies Of Our Times

JUNE 1990

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Environmental
Reporting
LOOT-inized

Herbicides,
Pesticides, and
Toxic Dumps

Nightline
Bombs in
Nebraska

Cockburn:
Their Dirt
and Ours

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Cover: Polluted water at Staten Island Beach, NY. Les Stone / Impact Visuals.

Green Tree, Red Roots?

Neoconservative George Will's April 19 syndicated column suggested that environmentalists were pinkos. LOOT reader Alex Winter sent the following letter to the editor of the Washington Post, who did not choose to print it:

April 20, 1990

To the Editor:

Me read with interest George Will's column about people that hug trees ["Earth Day's Hidden Agenda," April 19]. Him smart. He not say who these bad "clerisy" people be, but person with big brain like George Will use words like "clerisy" and "serried ranks" smarter than us, must be right. Me worried when no communists to attack, excepting Fidel, but now not worried. George say, "green tree has red roots." Now can hate and fear stupid bad dangerous people worry about trees and air. George speak for good people, they have money, they not stupid, not hug trees. They give smart George money. No problem; baseball season under way.

Lies Of Our Times

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To Our Readers

Lies Of Our Times is a magazine of media criticism. "Our Times" are the times we live in but also the words of the *New York Times*, the most cited news medium in the U.S., our paper of record. Our "Lies" are more than literal falsehoods; they encompass subjects that have been ignored, hypocrisies, misleading emphases, and hidden premises—the biases which systematically shape reporting. We can address only a sampling of the universe of media lies and distortions. But, we hope *LOOT* will go a long way toward correcting the record.

Photo Opportunities

Their Dirt and Ours

The *New York Times Magazine* cover story for April 29, 1990, showing a desolate Romanian industrial landscape with figures, displaced a story by Seymour Hersh, which its author probably reckoned was a sure candidate for the cover. Hersh recounted how Congress had ducked out of any serious Iran/contra inquiry and sedulously avoided calling witnesses who could have pushed Reagan toward impeachment.

The *New York Times*'s zeal for these sort of stories vanished in the mid-1970s, when Hersh was writing about Nixon and Watergate. Today, in the ideological nature of things, Eastern Europe easily beats out impeachment. This particular photo feature (Antonin Kratochvil and Marlise Simons, "Eastern Europe: The Polluted Lands") did not carry any substantive text, but the assumptions and inferences were clear enough:

- Their dirt is worse than ours. Stories and photo features about environmental havoc in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have particular appeal for western editors. They enforce the charge that, aside from anything else, socialism is actually filthier than capitalism, hence that capitalism is kinder to the environment.

- Appropriate standards of comparison are between the First and Second Worlds (i.e., the advanced capitalist countries and the East) rather than between the Second and Third. Compare Poland to Michigan rather than Mexico or Brazil.

Reporters and photographers rushing to cover the environmental mess in what used once to be called the socialist countries seem to be entirely unacquainted with the United States or Western Europe. Not so long ago the *Washington Post* ran a story by its Soviet correspondent declaring that the circumstances of uranium mining in the Soviet Union clearly showed the superiority of the American way. Was he aware of how uranium was mined in the Southwest? Had he studied the cancer rates of the Native Americans drafted to do the lethal work?

Do those noting the filthy streams and rivers of Poland or East Germany ever study reports on the sewer known as the Rhine, or even the proud Cuyahoga, hailed by Randy Newman ("Burn on, big river, burn on")?

How appropriate is it to compare the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe with the advanced capitalist countries? In terms of

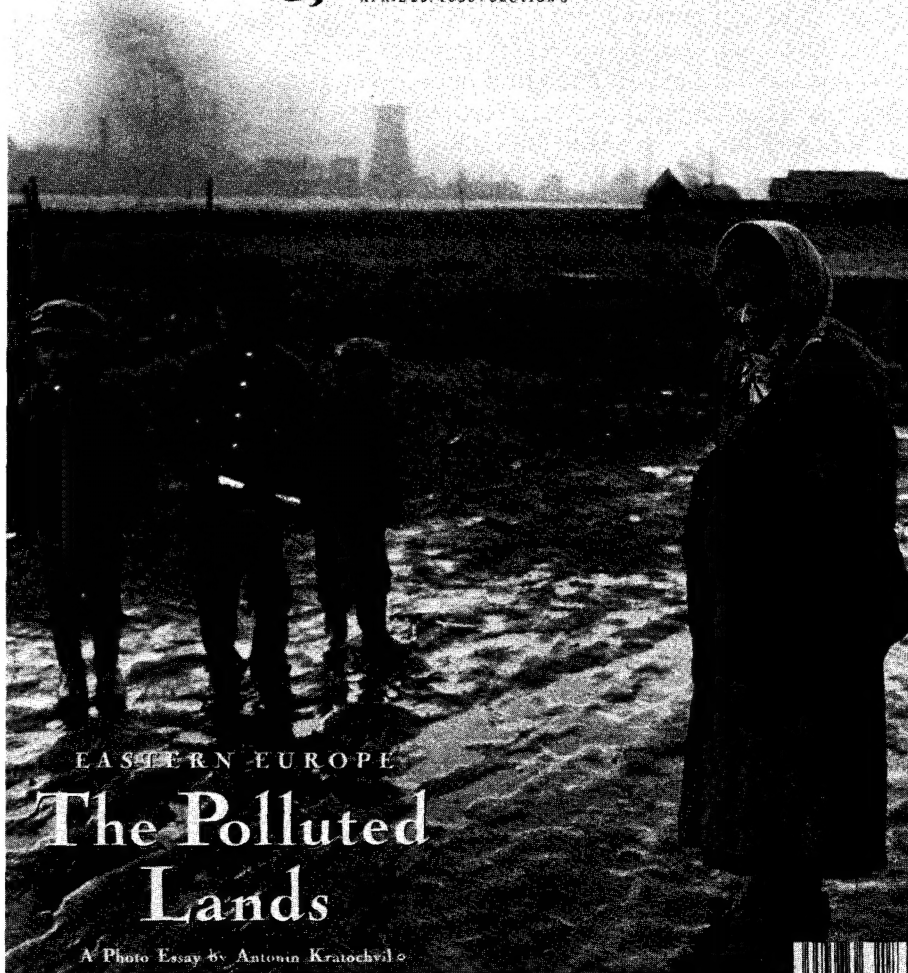
economic backwardness in the immediate postwar period, it would often be more relevant to contrast the environmental destruction associated with rapid industrial development with Third World patterns of destruction, often consequent upon decisions made in the First.

The heavy industrial pollution figuring in the *New York Times Magazine*'s cover portfolio has always been popular with photographers. It is easier to extort drama from a grimy face than from an insidious but less overt environmental assault, like toxic waste in drinking water in Silicon Valley or the suburbs of Los Angeles. Grime plays better than the anencephalous babies of Cubatão in Brazil (whose brains have been rotted by pollution).

The Eastern European portfolio reminded me of Eugene Smith's famous photographs published in *Life* 35 years ago of the mining valleys of south Wales. These days those Welsh mining pits are mostly closed and the region is now one of the relicts of a receding industrial age. The children of Gene Smith's miners probably have clean faces, but no jobs. In the first phase of Poland's new "market" austerity plan, about 60,000 small businesses went under. A bankrupt small businessman becomes photogenic around the time he goes to his first fascist rally. When will the *New York Times Magazine* start running photo features about ultranationalism in Eastern Europe? •

The New York Times Magazine

APRIL 29, 1990 / SECTION 6



The EPA Speaks

Jim Sibbison

Washington reporters sometimes portray William Reilly, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, in heroic terms. Fred Barnes, an editor at the *New Republic*, for one, says Reilly has achieved "amazing" success in shaping President Bush's environmental policy. He wrote in an article entitled "Green Thumb" that Reilly has persuaded the president to deal with global warming and the deterioration of the ozone layer that protects the Earth from solar radiation. Barnes had only one qualification: "Smooth as Reilly is, there's a soft spot in his performance. He gets too much credit, Bush too little. Bush really wants to be known as the 'environmental president' " (*New Republic*, January 1, 1990, p. 11).

As a former EPA press officer, I am obliged to point out that readers who accept Barnes's appraisal are victims of a public-relations ploy. Actually, Bush and Reilly have done nothing that alleviates ozone damage or global warming. These "achievements," if they occur at all, are conveniently scheduled to happen after they have left office, a tactic we used with the same subjects when I was in the EPA press office in the seventies. The ensuing publicity gave the illusion of accomplishment. These articles have the additional advantage of distracting attention from the EPA's unwillingness or inability to reduce pollution.

Nothing about the EPA-media relationship in Washington, in fact, has changed since I left the agency in the early days of Ronald Reagan. Reporters still depend largely on the EPA for news about its decisions. The EPA still takes advantage of this dependency—combined frequently with a superficial understanding of the issues—in a process known as spoonfeeding, providing reporters with carefully selected facts in press releases, press conferences, and interviews, all inaccurately picturing the EPA as a productive agency.

Even a Reilly speech before a well-informed audience can contain suspect data. Last November 27, he told a gathering of the activist Natural Resources Defense Council that the EPA had referred 60 criminal cases against polluters to the Justice Department for prosecution and had brought 4,017 civil cases against them in a single year. These were new highs. "As these figures indicate," Reilly said, "I'm working hard to instill an 'enforcement first' ethic in all of EPA's major regulatory programs." His speech, called "The Turning Point," was published in the business newsletter, *Environment Reporter* (December 8, 1989, p. 1387).

What Reilly failed to say was that a survey within his own agency showed that his figures were greatly misleading. In a large number of cases, the report said, the fines were so low that there was no incentive to stop polluting. In fact, the author of the report, EPA Inspector-General John Martin, said the system of token fines carried a potential within the agency for

Jim Sibbison is a correspondent for the British medical journal, *The Lancet*. Research for this article was supported by the Fund for Investigative Journalism.



EPA Administrator
William Reilly.

"fraud and abuse."

That is the sort of negative information Reilly does not like to advertise. His major vehicle for positive publicity is the press conference. Last June, for example, Reilly announced a new policy to accelerate the pace of the Superfund program to clean up hazardous waste dumps. As reported from Washington in the *Los Angeles Times* by Doug Jehl (June 15, 1989, p. 17), Reilly had decided to make more corporations clean up their own waste and pay the costs out of their treasuries. A common previous practice was for the EPA to clean up the dumps, then try to recover the cost from the culpable companies.

Here again Reilly omitted relevant facts. The Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), an arm of Congress, determined that cleaning dumps Reilly's way often ensures a poor job; the company wants to spend as little as possible on the work, and the EPA, in its anxiety to obtain an agreement, settles for the company's figures. In one year, says the OTA report, corporations saved "perhaps as much as \$1 billion" compared to the cost of effective cleanup jobs.

Environment at the Times

Writing stories based on EPA press conferences consumes as much energy as most reporters are willing to spend on this subject. This is not the case with Philip Shabecoff, who occasionally writes a column called "Environment" for the *New York Times*. He is more knowledgeable than most of his colleagues and enjoys access to EPA officials who provide him with exclusive stories. This symbiotic relationship may account for the unduly optimistic, even flattering, stories he often writes about the EPA's performance.

In a piece about Reilly, Shabecoff quoted one anonymous admirer at the EPA who said, "This is the busiest period I can ever remember here. For the first time in a long time we are working on behalf of the environment instead of pulling on some middle course." The columnist concluded, "Since taking office, he [Reilly] has been acting like the Green he really is" (*New York Times*, April 11, 1989, p. B8). This was about two months after Reilly took over; in my experience, it would be impossible for anyone to make a measurable change in the sprawling EPA bureaucracy in two years, much less two months.

This will not prevent Reilly from continuing to claim progress towards a clean environment that exists largely in EPA press releases. For its part, the press seems determined to remain the conduit for this prepackaged news. ●

EPA Official Accuses *Nightline* of Distortions

Dick Russell

April 5, 1990, ABC-TV's news program, *Nightline*, devoted its half hour to "low-level" radioactive waste, focusing on a small Nebraska county selected to receive such waste from seven nuclear power plants in five states by 1993. In preparing its coverage, *Nightline* first contacted Hugh Kaufman, a well-known whistleblower in the Environmental Protection Agency's hazardous-waste-siting division who, on his own time, was helping Nebraskans fight the dump.

At a "Save Boyd County" rally the following weekend, Kaufman described to a crowd of over 600 the events surrounding the airing of the program. Noting that this was "firsthand evidence that I would swear to in a court of law," the EPA official told of having informed *Nightline* producer George Rivera about the Nebraska saga.

"Then, just about when the crew was supposed to arrive in Nebraska, Mr. Rivera called and told me he was getting a lot of pressure from corporate ABC and might not be able to come. I said, 'Well, I can understand how that works, because major advertisers of the big networks can obviously influence them.' Mr. Rivera assured me that, 'No, that wasn't the problem.' He called me back later and assured me they would come after all." (Both Rivera and *Nightline* press spokesperson Laura Wessner deny that ABC's corporate structure sought to interfere in the program. "This is categorically untrue," says Wessner; "they are not involved in what we do on a day-to-day basis.")

And come they did. Rivera, correspondent Jed Duvall, and the camera crew arrived in the small town of Nelson to cover a citizens' monitoring committee meeting. "We started to put on record substantive technical issues," said Kaufman. These included the background of U.S. Ecology, the developer selected to build the \$40 million site in Nebraska. U.S. Ecology built two leaking nuclear dumpsites that have contaminated the groundwater in Illinois and Kentucky, and which are now closed.

"After about two hours of this," recalled Kaufman, "Mr. Rivera beckoned me over and said, 'Hugh, when are you gonna stop doing all this legal and technical b-s? Where's all the emotional stuff?' I told him that I thought it was important to film the technical issues so the *Nightline* audience could see the effort Nebraska citizens are putting into it. I said, 'This is not a

bunch of emotional lollipops here. These are *real* people who know little about nuclear waste — farmers who've got to make a living — taking their time to learn about the issues because a bunch of quick-buck artists have basically bought off a couple of politicians in the state.' Well, George wasn't happy about this, and after a while the cameras started to come down."

The *Nightline* crew then went to Lincoln, Nebraska, to review videotaped footage of earlier, more heated gatherings. "They said they wanted action," says Lynn Moorner, of Concerned Citizens of Nebraska, who provided the tapes. When the segment aired, as Kaufman reported, "They defined the issue this way: The public are a bunch of emotional misfits who think about Chernobyl and aren't doing their homework, while proponents are these brilliant technical experts. In other words, they walked in with a predetermined story when, in fact, what they had seen in Nebraska was just the opposite."

That was only the beginning. "Right before the show, I got a frantic call from Craig Zeisler (chairperson of Save Boyd County)," continued Kaufman. "He told me *Nightline* had lined him up to debate a highly paid Ph.D. proponent of siting radioactive waste facilities. Craig's a decent hard-working young man, but he's at the front end of learning about this and had never been

on national TV before. My first reaction was, I'm sure there's something wrong. Ted Koppel wouldn't do anything this outrageous, would he?"

When the "debate" portion of *Nightline* began — with novice Zeisler up against Stanley Goldsmith of the N.Y. Waste Site Commission, Zeisler demanded to know, "Why am I debating? Why don't you get some expert from the EPA?" Koppel, taken aback, replied along these lines: "Well, I thought it would be best to get

someone from here and someone from there."

The *Nightline* segment did not address U.S. Ecology's dismal track record, or the charges of potential fraud and bribery that Kaufman and the Concerned Citizens of Nebraska had initiated against state officials, or the possibility of "mixed waste" from nuclear weapons factories being shipped to a site on the edge of the Ogallala aquifer.

Ironically, added Kaufman, an ABC affiliate in Syracuse, N.Y., had recently aired a hard-hitting look at the radioactive-waste issue. "That documentary was reviewed by George Rivera and the ABC network people," he said, "so they can't claim they didn't know the issue. But, after all, their affiliate is a small station that doesn't depend on advertising from corporations that could be helped by a nuclear dump in Nebraska."

Nightline producer Rivera refused to comment on Kaufman's allegations. "Our producer had lengthy conversations with Kaufman on the background for the piece," added Wessner. "We did not ask him to be a guest because we wanted someone who had lived there all their life and could represent the average citizen taking a stand."



Members of the Save Boyd County Association, Nebraska.

Dick Russell is a writer who specializes in environmental issues.

What Peace Dividend?

Richard B. Du Boff

The *New York Times*'s designated specialist on the "peace dividend" appears to be Washington bureau staffer David E. Rosenbaum. On December 14, 1989 ("From Guns to Butter," p. A1), Rosenbaum wrote that the military spending cutbacks made possible by improving relations with the Soviet Union are posing a major question: "How will this windfall be allocated? The debate is likely to dominate American politics in the next decade." Later he asked, "Will a lack of design prevail as it did when new money came on the books as the Vietnam War wound down?"

What happened then, according to Rosenbaum, was that "from 1968, during the height of spending on the Vietnam War, to 1976, the military budget fell, in 1990 dollars, from \$302 billion to \$195 billion. The way it was spent was hardly noticed. Without a plan or much public debate, most of that money went to increased Social Security benefits and Medicare payments." The same note was sounded by Howard Gleckman in *Business Week* (April 2, 1990, p. 33): "The government used the 1970s' 'peace dividend' to shift billions of dollars from the military to the aged" via increased social security benefits.

Rosenbaum expanded on this theme on March 25, 1990 ("No Long-Term Plan on Military Saving," p. A1). Reporting that the Bush administration had assigned no one to study how military savings might be allocated, he concluded: "This worries many scholars and some politicians, who fear that without forethought, the windfall will be frittered away. After the Vietnam War, unplanned and unrestrained social spending gobbled up the dollars saved by the American withdrawal."

Military spending did fall in real terms from 1968 to 1976: Money outlays rose 9 percent, but inflation was pushing the price level up by 65 percent. But for such a potential peace dividend to be captured and redirected toward social programs, two other conditions must be met. First, the tax revenues formerly channeled to the Pentagon must be kept available for other programs. Second, deliberate policy decisions must be taken to expand social programs beyond levels fixed by current legislation. Were these two conditions met, as Rosenbaum implies they were, between 1968 and 1976? The answers are to be found in the following figures (in billions of dollars), from *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 1991*:

Spending Increases:	1968 to 1976:	1976 to 1980:
Military Spending	\$ 8.3	\$ 47.5
Social Security and Medicare	61.2	60.9
Income Security	49.0	25.8
Revenue Increases:		
Social Security taxes	\$56.9	\$ 67.0
All other revenues	88.2	152.1

Richard B. Du Boff is professor of economics at Bryn Mawr College.

From 1968 to 1976, military spending rose only \$8.3 billion, far less than social security and medicare and income security. But the \$61.2 billion increase in social security and medicare was nearly covered by the rise in social security taxes (\$56.9 billion), so it can hardly be said that social security and medicare captured tax revenues that would otherwise have gone to the Pentagon.

All other revenues, chiefly from individual and corporate income taxes, increased by \$88.2 billion. Of this, income security took \$49 billion (nearly 56 percent). Could this be the "unrestrained social spending [that] gobbled up" the post-Vietnam War peace dividend?

Twenty years ago, a short-term slowdown in military spending created a potential peace dividend, but none materialized.

Income security comprises unemployment insurance, housing assistance, food stamps, and other welfare expenditures. Of the \$49 billion increase, \$32.5 billion—two thirds—occurred between 1973 and 1976. This reveals what Rosenbaum's readers would not know, namely that this "unrestrained social spending" was largely a forced response to the deep recession of 1973 to 1975, by several measures the most severe of the eight recessions since the Second World War. When the economy contracts like this, federal spending on virtually all income security categories increases *automatically* as jobless rates rise and many more households fall below the poverty line. No new legislation is enacted; no social programs are expanded beyond their existing legal limits. There was, in other words, nothing "unrestrained" about any of the spending increases on non-military programs between 1968 and 1976.

In the last four pre-Reagan years, 1976 to 1980, "normalcy" was restored. Military spending rose considerably more than income security, but less than social security and medicare. Now, however, the increases in social security taxes more than paid for those in social security and medicare spending; the social security and medicare accounts were generating a surplus that was "gobbled up" by other federal programs, including the military. Yet no *New York Times* reporter charged the Pentagon with taking billions of dollars away from the aged.

Twenty years ago, a short-term slowdown in military spending created a potential peace dividend, but none materialized. This time around, federal revenues remain crippled by the 1981 to 1983 tax cuts, while on the expenditure side proposed cutbacks in military spending remain modest at best. Declines of two percent per year in Pentagon budgets—even if implemented—can easily be diverted away from social programs; capital-gains tax reductions, savings-and-loan bailouts, and other rightwing priorities will efficiently swallow up any peace dividend likely to develop during the next few years. The *New York Times* can be counted on to bury this story by focusing attention on the struggle to reduce the federal budget deficit, the dilemmas of choosing which military programs to cut, and other agenda issues. ●

Incineration Woes

Elizabeth Kaplan

The Ironbound section of Newark has endured more than its fair share of environmental indignities. Wedged between the Passaic River and three major highways, this working-class neighborhood is home to about 60,000 people, many of Portuguese descent.

Ironbound was also home to the Diamond Shamrock Chemical Company, now a Superfund site that boasts the highest concentration of dioxin in the country. PCB contamination has closed the Ironbound Stadium. Large concentrations of phenols have been discovered on the proposed site for a neighborhood swimming pool.

On a 25-acre tract adjoining another of Ironbound's problems—the Otillo Landfill, still being studied for cleanup 26 years after it was identified as an illegal dumping site—rises the largest incinerator under construction in New Jersey. Once it goes on line, the Essex County incinerator will spew nearly 4,500 tons of acid gases, heavy metals, and other pollutants into the air each year, significantly compounding the area's toxic stew.

The *Star-Ledger*

Newark is also home to the *Star-Ledger*, Essex County's only daily and New Jersey's largest newspaper, with a circulation of 460,000. The *Star-Ledger's* coverage of the incineration issue has been informed—or deformed—by its wholesale acceptance of the official agenda on the trash woes that have become New Jersey's collective obsession.

When the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection enshrined incineration as the cornerstone of the state's solid-waste policy nearly a decade ago, it preempted any serious promotion of alternative strategies. State policy may pay lip service to recycling and source reduction, but these options are undermined by the massive commitment of financial and political capital to incineration. About 85 percent of the waste stream is both recyclable and combustible. Since mass-burn incinerators require a heavy flow of trash to operate profitably, they create disincentives to promote recycling and reduce trash production.

By ignoring basic policy questions, the official version of the trash "crisis" limits the debate to issues of environmental safety and economic feasibility. Even within this narrow arena, the *Star-Ledger* does not question industry and political dogma.

A clear example of this willing suspension of disbelief is the *Star-Ledger's* unblinking acceptance of the cost projections for the Essex County incinerator. County Executive Nicholas Amato has repeatedly insisted that garbage disposal costs ("tipping fees," as they're known in the industry) will fall to \$65 per ton, from the current \$107, once the incinerator is fully operational.

This claim has never been substantiated and was thoroughly discredited three years ago by the devastating analysis of the in-

cinerator contracts conducted by the N.J. Office of the Public Advocate. Yet the \$65-per-ton estimate is a boilerplate statement in every *Star Ledger* article about the incinerator.

Perpetuating the Mythology

The *Star-Ledger* further perpetuates the official incineration mythology through its dismissive treatment of community opposition. The nearly decade-long battle against the Essex County incinerator has been led by the Ironbound Committee Against Toxic Waste. This group was joined early last year by a newly formed countywide organization, Eco-Alert (Essex County Organization for Alternatives to Incineration), which includes residents from the more suburban parts of the county.

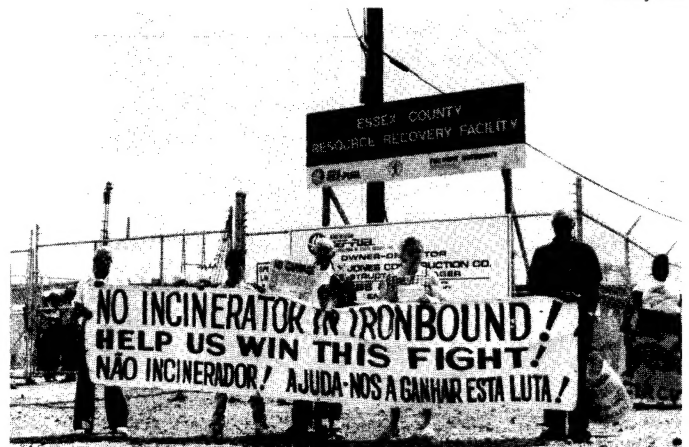
The *Star-Ledger* consistently marginalizes community challenges to incineration. Indeed, a 1989 editorial borrowed the industry's disparaging label for the grassroots environmental movement. "Garbage Woes" (October 27, 1989, p. 24) blamed a "wave of buck passing and NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) obstructionism" for the state's "halting and hesitant" progress in building regional incinerators.

The *Star-Ledger's* news coverage is more subtle in its disdain. Eco-Alert recently challenged the \$65-per-ton myth in a 14-page critique that documented seven major cost considerations that were excluded from the county's projections. The critique concluded that, far from reducing tipping fees, the incinerator will drastically increase the cost of trash disposal.

The *Star-Ledger* disposed of this critique in a cursory article with a lead paragraph that diluted the thrust of Eco-Alert's challenge. "The cost of disposing of ash generated by the garbage incinerator ... was questioned yesterday by environmental activists, who argue the ash could contain toxic elements that would greatly increase the projected price," wrote Diane Curcio ("Ash Disposal Viewed as Incinerator Flaw," April 15, 1990, p. 29). Besides reducing the critique's arguments to a single issue (in distorted form), this sentence ignores its direct assault on the credibility of Mr. Amato's pronouncements.

This article typifies how the *Star-Ledger* cordons off dissent. Unfortunately, its establishment bias is no aberration. In the absence of competition, many sizable local papers have become disturbingly complacent and insular in their coverage, a dangerous trend, especially in light of the growing identity of interests among media owners and other large corporate entities. ●

Nancy Zak



Demonstration against Ironbound incinerator.

Elizabeth Kaplan is a freelance writer based in Montclair, New Jersey, and a member of Eco-Alert.

Flacking for Dow

Tod Ensign

In the last few years, the *New York Times* has spent as much space editorializing about Agent Orange as it has reporting on it. The issue of whether the herbicide—sprayed during the Vietnam War to defoliate jungles—harmed veterans first surfaced in 1978, although the question of its effect on the Vietnamese had been raised a decade earlier. Initially, the *Times* did not pay much attention, but once a class-action lawsuit was filed against Dow Chemical and the other manufacturers, it assigned an experienced science reporter, Richard Severo, to the issue.

At first, Severo's articles appeared regularly, including a comprehensive three-part series which drew an attack from Reed Irvine's *Accuracy in Media*. But as the lawsuit bogged down and the Veterans Administration (since January 1990 the Department of Veterans Affairs) continued to deny nearly all claims for health benefits, Severo was taken off the beat and coverage waned.

However, in February 1984, when the U.S. Air Force published its health study of the spray missions—known as Operation Ranch Hand—the *Times* treated it as a major scientific event. This study, which found no elevated health problems among the spray handlers, was central to the government's position that Agent Orange health claims were baseless. The logic was simple: If those who worked directly with the spray did not suffer increased problems, then ground troops had no reason to worry.

But as recently as November 1989, U.S. Senator Tom Daschle (Dem.-S.D.), a strong supporter of the veterans' claims, presented evidence to Congress that this study was a fraud. He accused the Air Force of concealing data that Ranch Hand veterans suffered higher rates of skin cancer and had children with twice the rate of birth defects as those of non-spray personnel. Daschle released a long-suppressed version of the study that concluded, "the Ranchhandlers have the predominance of adverse findings" compared with the control group. The *Times* did not bother to report Senator Daschle's allegations even though it had repeatedly cited the Ranch Hand study as evidence that there was no merit to the veterans' health claims.

Pushing the Settlement

Once the class-action lawsuit was settled on the eve of the trial in May 1984, the *Times* dropped any pretense of journalistic objectivity. Articles appeared that praised federal Judge Jack Weinstein for his skill in fashioning the "ingenious" settlement. Only once did the

Tod Ensign, a lawyer, is co-author of *GI Guinea Pigs* (New York: Playboy Press, 1980) and director of Citizen Soldier, a GI/veterans advocacy group in New York City.

Times report that virtually all the plaintiffs were opposed to the judge's imposition of the settlement, favoring instead a public trial of the case. When lawyers asked Weinstein to set aside the settlement as grossly inadequate (less than three percent of the claimants ever received a penny), the *Times's* editorial mill shifted to high gear.

On March 8, 1985, the *Times* let loose with an editorial salvo whose ferocity probably surprised even Weinstein, its intended beneficiary. Titling its tirade "Orangemail: Why It Got Paid," the *Times* explained that the whole case amounted to nothing more than greedy lawyers stirring false fears among veterans and then "shaking down [chemical] companies" who agreed to settle only because they feared a worse result at the hands of an easily manipulated jury. Vets were unjustly criticized because it took them several years to make an association between their health problems and Agent Orange—as if the military did not keep them ignorant about the defoliant's lethal effects. Predictably, the *Times* also tossed in the now discredited Ranch Hand study as further evidence that veterans had no reason to worry.

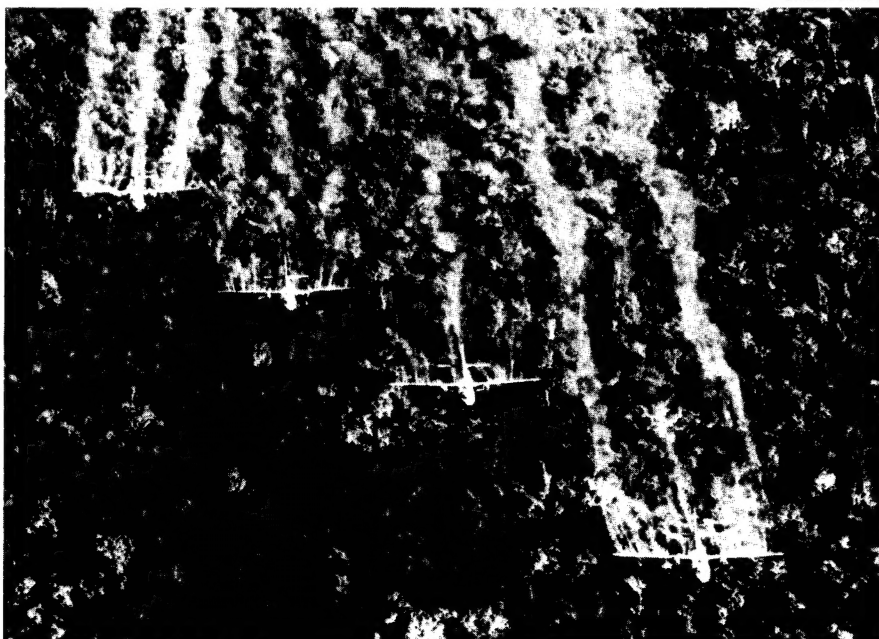
To drive home its point, it paired this editorial with one entitled "Greenmail: Who's the Villain?" which examined the ethics of corporate raiders like Carl Icahn. For the *Times* there is apparently little difference between ailing veterans trying to recover money for their injuries and high-rollers who plunder corporations for millions through brazen takeover schemes.

Later, as an appeals court was considering challenges to the settlement, the *Times's* editorialists took up the manufacturers' cause again. Another impassioned defense of the settlement was published, warning veterans again that they would receive nothing if the case went to trial (September 4, 1986, p. A26).

Recent Developments

In recent months, several developments have changed the outlook for Agent Orange compensation from the government. Several industry-sponsored studies which found no health effects have been discredited as fraudulent.

Citizen Soldier



Air Force planes spraying Agent Orange over Vietnam.

It was only when the Centers for Disease Control issued a report that connected one rare cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, to service in Vietnam, but failed to correlate any diseases directly to Agent Orange, that the *Times* gave the item prominent coverage (Warren E. Leary, "Higher Risk of Rare Cancer Found for Vietnam Veterans," March 30, 1990, p. A10). This was a two-column, 24-inch article with the large subhead "A study finds no link between Agent Orange and 6 cancers."

On the other hand, a few weeks later, a task force of independent scientists assembled by three veterans' organizations accused the Department of Veterans Affairs of distorting evidence and declared that exposure to Agent Orange was linked to at least eight disease categories, including several cancers, neurological diseases, birth defects, and sterility. This report was ignored by the *Times* even though the wire services and other dailies carried the item. (See Associated Press dispatch, May 1, 1990; Bill McAllister, "Viet Defoliant Linked to More Diseases," *Washington Post*, May 1, 1990.)

Indeed, as John Hanson, deputy director for public relations of the American Legion, said, "The issue of Agent Orange is not going to go away. I can't understand why our national newspaper of record doesn't assign a reporter to the veterans' beat." It appears that the *Times* decided long ago that Agent Orange was not responsible for health problems suffered by Vietnam veterans and their families. Whether its motive was to shield the chemical manufacturers from massive liability or not, the paper's readers have been ill-served. ●

Boffey's Bhopal Blues

Ellen Ray and William H. Schaap

Large quantities of the extremely toxic gas, methyl isocyanate, leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide plant at Bhopal, India, on December 3, 1984. Two thousand people died almost immediately (and another thousand over the past few years), and more than 200,000 were injured, a fourth of them incurably. (More than 600,000 injury claims were filed with the Indian government.) Within two weeks, *New York Times* science reporter Philip M. Boffey leapt to the defense of the giant multinational corporation.

Boffey's Apologetics

In a series of prominent articles Boffey trivialized the enormity of the disaster with unthinkable apologetics, each statement more callous than the last. The lead sentence of his first, front-page piece ("Disaster in India Sharpens Debate on Doing Business in Third World," December 16, 1984, sec. 1, p. 1) complained that the accident "that killed at least 2,000 people has obscured the fact that pesticides have also brought better health to millions of people in India and other third world countries." The risk of such accidents, he said, "must be balanced against their value."

His next five paragraphs discussed the great value of these

pesticides, although Boffey noted that the "experts" he quoted demanded anonymity "lest they be accused of trying to defend the pesticide industry." He concluded by describing the Bhopal disaster as "a special case, a rare occurrence in which a toxic chemical used in making pesticides was inadvertently released," implying it was to Union Carbide's credit that it did not release the gas on purpose.

Two days later Boffey continued his puffery ("Bhopal's Doctors Given High Praise," December 18, 1984, p. A8). This time he wrote of how well the medical system worked and how much worse things could have been. "More than 2,000 people died as a result of the disaster," he wrote, "but it was agreed that the toll in deaths and permanent impairment could have been vastly higher in the absence of quick and effective medical treatment." Here was a reporter covering a major disaster writing pieces like a paid expert for the defense in a personal injury suit. Indeed, his praise of the care victims received undercut in advance claims they would later bring against the company.

Two more days and Boffey told his readers that the gas leak that "killed at least 2,000 people and injured perhaps 150,000 more ... has thus far caused remarkably little lasting damage to the stunned survivors" ("Few Lasting Health Effects Found Among India Gas-Leak Survivors," December 20, 1984, p. A1). Boffey now felt qualified to discuss the long-term effects of an unprecedented chemical accident less than three weeks after it happened. This particular article was replete with anecdotal reportage, hardly proper in scientific reporting: "doctors say they have yet to find a case of permanent blindness," and "brain damage, nerve damage, and paralysis also appear to be limited." Finally, and as incorrectly as his other assessments, he claimed that "most of the survivors are emerging unimpaired."

In none of Boffey's writings did he discuss corporate conduct, practices, or responsibility.

The Emerging Truth

It was three months later that *Times* readers finally learned a bit more of the truth of Bhopal, and that was from Steven R. Weisman, not a science reporter but a general correspondent covering India. On March 31, 1985, Weisman reported from Bhopal that "Thousands of people exposed to the poison gas that leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide factory here in December are suffering from incurable problems with breathing, sleeping, digesting food, and performing even light physical labor, doctors say" ("Disabling and Incurable Ailments Still Affect Thousands in Bhopal," March 31, 1985, p. A1). Officials noted that "5,000 to 10,000 people will probably never be able to earn a living because of their injuries." Independent health groups asserted that "there could be as many as 50,000 people seriously injured." In contrast to Boffey's piece in praise of the medical care at the time of the disaster, Weisman noted that there had been widespread criticism of it. Most importantly, he had the courage to state that Bhopal "was the worst industrial accident in history."

Philip Boffey's rather benevolent view of Bhopal might be simply a journalistic curiosity. But, as it happens, he is now the science editor of the *New York Times*. Having thought the tragedy of Bhopal was handled well, he seems similarly inclined concerning the disastrous effects of Agent Orange. ●

Down the Memory Hole

George Seldes: Memory and the Cold War

As Eastern Europe heeds a siren song that projects Utopian Capitalism as the sole guarantor of freedom, incessant media replays of its democratic euphoria divert the attention of U.S. citizens from the free-market ecocide and debt collection that ravage our planet.

Against this media myth-making stands the legacy of journalist George Seldes who, today nearly 100 years old, embodies the struggle against historical amnesia. Seldes's newsletter *In Fact*, published weekly from 1940 to 1950, was the first U.S. publication wholly devoted to media criticism. Today, this forgotten forerunner of *I.F. Stone's Weekly* and *Lies Of Our Times* bears witness to the Cold War onslaught against capitalism's touted centerpiece, "the free marketplace of ideas."

Seldes was vaporized into a non-person by the *New York Times*, primarily because of his 1934 testimony before the National Labor Relations Board favoring the Newspaper Guild's successful drive to unionize the *Times* (see George Seldes, *Witness to a Century* [New York: Ballantine, 1987], p. 349). Managing Editor Edwin James retaliated, vowing a total blackout of Seldes's work. Deemed "unfit to print" despite brilliant exposés and 20 books, Seldes was banned by the *Times* for 50 years. His ongoing crime was *In Fact*'s whistleblowing against U.S. instigation of the Cold War and big media's witting collaboration. *In Fact* folded in 1950 under fierce government/media intimidation. Likewise Seldes vanished from public view for 30 years, until his 1980 resurrection as an unidentified talking head in Warren Beatty's film, *Reds*. Alert credits watchers realized that our greatest opposition journalist still lived.

In Fact collapsed under the weight of FBI intimidation of its subscribers and cannibalization by fellow journalists. Incessant red-baiting by Scripps-Howard, Gannett, and Hearst columnists and radio oracles like Fulton Lewis, George Sokolsky, and Westbrook Pegler—who Seldes says vilified him as a "paid Kremlin agent"—was matched by the deadly silence of "respectables" like the *Times*, whose Cold War commitments betrayed their professed concern for journalistic freedom.

In Fact's relentless naming names of Cold War instigators targeted the emerging national-security consensus. A secret vehicle for anti-Cold War opposition and suppressed news, it featured anonymous contributions by over 200 mainstream newspeople including top columnist Drew Pearson and CBS com-

mentator Don Hollenbeck. An unheralded hero was a stenographer fired for secretly listing Seldes on the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) confidential distribution list, enabling *In Fact* to expose NAM's daily disinformation output and media assets.

Once reaching 186,000 subscribers, *In Fact*'s free-market success posed trouble for Cold War central planning. One 1950 issue exposed U.S. government/media collaboration in wrecking United Nations attempts to end the Cold War and suppressing U.N. reports that criticized the Marshall Plan's anti-Sovietism for destroying global free trade. But 1950 also marked all-out State Department coordinated scare campaigns using the Soviet Menace to stampede public acceptance of permanent rearmament. At top-secret meetings, key planners like banker and future Defense Secretary Robert Lovett prescribed "a much vaster propaganda machine" (Jerry Sanders, *Peddlers of Crisis* [Boston: South End Press, 1983], p. 51); the State Department's Edward Barrett, future Dean of Columbia's School of Journalism, endorsed an all-out "psychological scare campaign" needing "most likely 10 days" for the U.S. public "to be sold and

Wide World Photos



George Seldes in the 1930s.

kept sold" on permanent re-armament (Edward Barrett, "Top Secret Memo to Acheson, April 6, 1950," Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Volume 1, 1950, pp. 225-26). The Committee on the Present Danger, whose charter members included *Times* publisher Arthur Sulzberger and CBS's Edward R. Murrow, broadcast anti-Soviet alerts by luminaries like educator James B. Conant and scientist supreme Vannevar Bush over the disinformation vehicle of choice, Mutual Broadcasting System's 600 nationwide radio stations (Sanders, *op. cit.*, p. 90). While voices like Seldes's were silenced, the public's primary source of intelligence on Soviet military intentions since 1945 was the CIA-recruited Gehlen Organization, Hitler's Eastern Front intelligence service (Christopher Simpson, *Blowback* [New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988], p. 56).

In Fact remains dangerous today; it is our hidden history. It explodes prevailing myths characterizing World War II and the Cold War as good wars that enabled democracy to prevail over fascist and communist evil. It sharply details how the ruling elites in the U.S.—the Rockefellers, Morgans, and DuPonts—helped foment both catastrophes. And it remembers the Wall Street-fascist alliance that drove Germany's pre-war re-armament, profited treasonably via wartime trade, planned the postwar "American Century," destroyed the Soviet-American alliance, abandoned genuine de-Nazification in favor of German re-armament, and instigated the Cold War.

A different future requires discrediting the Cold War ethos, the media's triumphalism, and its foremost mausoleum—the \$300 billion U.S. arms budget. A major resource for this struggle, *In Fact* is recoverable from the memory hole at some major public and university libraries. Having outlived several obituaries, the vivid Seldes, a national treasure, grants interviews that still dissent and remember from Hartland Four Corners, Vermont.

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The *Cosmo* Woman

Kathie Sarachild

A recent article in the *New York Times* business section on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the women's magazine *Cosmopolitan* ("The Cosmo Girl at 25: She Still Wants It All," April 21, 1990, p. 31) suggests how media images about an insurgent movement's origins and history can be used to counter that insurgency.

The opening paragraphs read like ad copy for *Cosmopolitan*. The reporter, Randall Rothenberg, then gathers together a number of pundits, advertising executives, women's magazine editors, and professors, and through various forms of bias, omission, and unequal treatment in coverage, suggests that the *Cosmo* girl, with her sexually liberated image and her claims to "have it all," was actually one of the radical leading forces behind the emergence of feminism. But this is an utter fabrication, made possible only by ignoring the original sources of the 1960s women's liberation movement.

"American women have changed" in the 25 years since the *Cosmo* girl was born, says the *Times* article. Although the author seems to be referring to feminism, feminism is much more about women creating change than being changed. But *this* feminism is never described. Here is the spin: the use of phrases like "the liberated ideal," "sexual freedom," and "the sexual revolution."

The Sexual Revolution Is Not Women's Liberation

This, however, is not feminism at all. The equation of a sexual revolution with feminism is standard media invention. Feminists not quoted in the article would have revealed that, in the 1960s, talk about the sexual revolution was a significant feminist target. Part of this liberation fraud was the notion that sexual liberation could be achieved without women's liberation—and without sexual responsibility from men. Women still got pregnant and died trying to get abor-

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tions, to name just one problem—which is still with us. Having the right enlightened opinion or "cosmopolitan" attitude is not enough for a woman to be liberated. A collective struggle of women for liberation, mobilized in many forms, was—and still is—necessary.

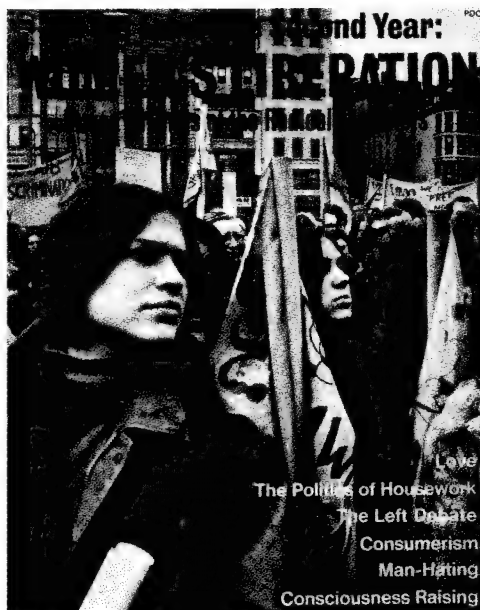
The Creation of the Post-Feminist Image

A strong "post-feminist" image was projected in the media, thus perpetuating the idea that feminist struggles were a thing of the past and were no longer necessary because women had already come a long way. *Cosmo*, far from leading the feminist cause, was leading post-feminism. The *Times* might as well have run a story casting the familiar Virginia Slims ads as one of the forces behind the resurgence of feminism. Their beguiling message, "You've come a long way, baby," early post-feminism, was besieging women in the 1960s, as it is now, with the premise of pseudo-emancipation. It is the only interpretation of 1960s feminism to which the *Times* pays homage—a recasting of feminism that will not strike at the coffers of the big advertisers.

The Fashion Industry

Vivid women's liberation protests, like the one at the Miss America Pageant of 1968 against such instruments of female torture as high heels, straight skirts, girdles, and bras, were very hard on the fashion industry. This fact alone would have been sufficient incentive for the fashion pages of the *Times* and other papers to fight their battle to finesse women's liberation—in the long term a losing battle. Indeed, its effect on the fashion industry is clear in the anniversary issue of *Cosmopolitan*, touted in the *Times*. There is not a single ad for high heels (my particular most hated instrument of torture in 1968). Although you see high heels in ads for other things, you also as often as not see bare feet. The shoe ads are all for running shoes.

Thus an effect of women's liberation organizing and activism is there in the twenty-fifth anniversary issue, but our work has been rendered invisible historically, both by *Cosmo* and the *New York Times*. This tactic cuts from history the connection between a movement and the changes it produces and cuts people off from politicizing information—in this case burying the popularity and effectiveness of the radical, 1960s women's liberationist years of the movement. ●



Finessing the changing times. *Notes From the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists* (1970), above, shows cover women at rally to repeal New York State abortion laws. The twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Cosmopolitan* (1990), below, shows the *Cosmo* girl [sic] Madonna.



Miscovering the Environment

Penny Mintz

It does not take a rocket scientist to see that the Earth's ailments carry little weight at the *New York Times*. Even in the weeks surrounding Earth Day, most environmental stories were buried deep in the paper, and what was there contained striking contradictions and blatant examples of industry bias.

Industry Bias

A particularly telling example of bias appeared in "Newsprint Gamble Proving Costly" (April 21, 1990, p. 31). Without mentioning until far into the article that the *Times* owns part of three Canadian newsprint mills (see Doug Henwood, "The *Times*'s Own Paper Mills," p. 20), Alex S. Jones presented a series of excuses for not moving forward with recycled paper: For one thing, retooling is expensive, which is undoubtedly true. But, Jones went on: "It is not clear if the demand for recycled newsprint is more than an environmental fad," a gratuitous snipe at concern for the environment Jones attributed to unnamed "industry executives." And, he added, "it cannot be taken for granted that old papers suitable for recycling would be available in sufficient quantity." This is belied by many other reports. *Newsday*, for example, reported the very next day: "There has been a glut of used newsprint and a failure to create markets to reprocess what is collected" (*Earth: A Special Report*, April 22, 1990, p. 2). But then *Newsday* does not have an investment in the status quo like the *Times*'s.

Rick Gerharter / Impact Visuals



A neighborhood recycling facility in California.

Equally striking was the *Times*'s bias in covering an Exxon shareholders' meeting. Compare the *Times* article to the *Wall Street Journal*'s account of the same meeting. The *Journal* is no bastion of environmental activism, but look at the two headlines. In the *Wall Street Journal*: "Environmentalists Claim Gains at Exxon Meeting" (April 26, 1990, p. B1). The *Times* said: "Exxon Votes Down Environmental Plans" (April 26, 1990, p. A22).

The opposing perspectives continue through the articles.

The *Journal* stressed the "symbolic victory" won by environmentalists, while the *Times* said "environmental initiatives were overwhelmingly rejected." The *Journal* pointed out that "the measures garnered a larger share of votes than expected," but the *Times* said, "None of the proposals received more than 10 percent of the more than 900 million shares that were voted."

Handling Plutonium

Contradictions raise an interesting question: How much time must pass between two diametrically opposed versions for people to forget the first and believe the second? Not very much, apparently.

A *Times* story on the Rocky Flats, Colorado, plutonium plant (April 17, 1990, p. B10) is a case in point. According to Matthew L. Wald's report, the Department of Energy (DOE) had been trying to get around environmental laws on hazardous-waste storage by claiming that the incinerator ash at Rocky Flats was "material awaiting recycling." But federal District Judge Lewis T. Babcock ruled otherwise. Since the Rocky Flats plant had recovered plutonium from less than 10 percent of the ash, the site was more a storage area than a recycling plant. The wastes, Wald reported, were thus found to be "subject to regulation by Colorado, and are being stored illegally."

Two weeks later, it was as if Judge Babcock's decision had never happened. In a story on restarting old nuclear plants, the *Times* ran an AP dispatch which described Rocky Flats as a plant that "purifies and recycles plutonium from old warheads" ("New Dates Disclosed for Restarting Nuclear Plants," May 2, 1990, p. A22). Fifteen days is clearly enough for people to forget the old facts and believe the new ones.

Who's At Fault?

The Wald article on Rocky Flats contained another absurd flaw; it blamed the workers there for safety violations in the plant. With no hint of irony, Wald wrote that "recently investigators found that seven bombs' worth of plutonium had accumulated in ventilation pipes, largely because workers had bypassed safety systems" (April 17, 1990, p. B10).

The workers had punched holes in clogged ventilation filters. Plutonium dust had built up, preventing the air from circulating inside the protected boxes where, with gloved hands, they were building nuclear warheads. The air filters should have been changed. But the workers did not punch those holes simply because that was the easiest solution, despite Wald's implication. As Stephen Schwartz, legislative coordinator for nuclear campaigns at Greenpeace, told *LOOT*, "It is incomprehensible that a worker would go ahead and do this without the knowledge and approval of a supervisor and, by implication, of people at DOE. Workers are under enormous pressure to produce, and to produce at all costs," he added. "Despite a lot of well-intentioned statements by the new Secretary of Energy, Admiral Watkins, production is their number one priority. Safety has always taken a back seat."

Wald accepted the DOE's explanation without question. With all the resources of the *New York Times* behind him, he could have made a few calls to check its accuracy. The unfortunate truth may be that Wald knew the real story, but also knew that the *Times* would prefer to ignore it. ●

The Kidnaped Sheik and the *Times*

Alexander George

It is a tenet of "objective" reporting on the Middle East that Israel defends itself through *reprisals* against *terrorist outrages* perpetrated by Arabs — Palestinians in particular. This convenient semantic/ideologic framework provides the U.S. public with a reassuring picture of things, given our enormous and varied support for Israeli policies. For example, Robert Pear in a news piece asserts that "Israel is known for having a firm policy against terrorism and has often retaliated against those responsible for terrorist attacks" ("White House Reaffirms Anti-Terrorist Policy While Taking Steps to Work Around It," *New York Times*, August 4, 1989, p. A6). Since one cannot know something false, it follows that Israel is strongly opposed to terrorism and, consequently, that when it does use force it is only to defend itself against such attacks. Again: consider the view that "No country takes a harder anti-terrorist line than Israel" ("Never Say 'Never Talk,'" Editorial, *New York Times*, August 3, 1989, p. A22). A naturally inferred corollary is that Israel is implacably opposed to terrorist activities, such as kidnaping, and engages only in reprisals against such, for example, in retaliatory captures.

Many instances of just this approach were offered by mainstream reaction to Israel's illegal kidnaping of Sheik Abdul Karim Obeid (and two others) from Lebanon in July 1989 (with one person killed in the process, an irrelevant detail deemed unworthy of mention by most commentators). Thus, according to A. M. Rosenthal, "The Israelis did not kidnap the sheik. They captured him. The difference is not a matter of semantics but of the most profound political and moral importance. It is the difference between terrorism and antiterrorism" ("The Next Terrorist Crisis," *New York Times*, August 4, 1989, p. A23). William Safire obviously concurred, praising the kidnaping as "Israel's painful but gutsy decision to capture" the sheik ("No August Doldrums," *New York Times*, August 3, 1989, p. A23). A few days later, the kidnaping, now only a "capture," was downgraded even further to a

"snatching [of] a suspected terrorist" ("The Moment to Free All Hostages," Editorial, *New York Times*, August 6, 1989, p. E20).

It is well known that Palestinians and Israelis have been engaged in attacks and counterattacks for decades, with many more Palestinians than Israelis killed in this dance of death. There would appear to be no reason whatsoever to label Palestinians (and other Arabs) as the aggressors/terrorists and Israelis as the victims/counterterrorists in this process. Nevertheless this is now built in to western word usage, so that the sheik can be "captured" in "retaliation."

It is also revealing that *Times* commentators do not find it worth mentioning that, according to Lebanese accounts, "as the commando squad was leaving the building, a neighbor, Hussein Abu Zeid, opened his door, apparently to see what was happening. The Lebanese sources said the Israelis shot him in the head and he died instantly" (Jackson Diehl, "Israelis Seize Imam in Lebanon," *Washington Post*, July 29, 1989, p. A1). When a hijacker shoots an innocent bystander, this is an act of terror. When it is done by a western state, it is all part of a "daring arrest." Unsurprisingly, when Jesse Jackson called this episode "an act of terror," he was met with immediate condemnation by a representative of the American Jewish Congress who described Jackson's remarks as "incredible and unfortunate" ("Jackson Calls Moslem's Capture By Israelis an 'Act of Terror,'" *Washington Post*, August 5, 1989, p. A13). Incredible? Possibly. Unfortunate? Only in their highlighting the semantic double-dealing and lack of honesty of the western commentators in general and the *Times* in particular.

AP Paranoia



This photo of two children with posters of Sheik Obeid was transmitted by the Associated Press on August 5, 1989. The caption which accompanies it is astonishing. It reads, in its entirety: "ZEALOT CHILDREN — Scarved Shiite Moslem Children, brandishing placards of kidnaped Sheik Obeid, take a break Friday from marching in a Hezbollah demonstration, in west Beirut's southern suburbs. The demonstration was held to protest the abduction of a pro-Iranian, Hezbollah-affiliated cleric, Sheik Abdul Karim Obeid in southern Lebanon, by Israeli commandos last Friday."

These "scarved, Shiite zealots" must be all of four years old, and they have probably never "brandished" anything more than a piece of candy. The caption on the placards, incidentally, reads: "Kidnaping and detention only intensify our resolve to struggle and resist."

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Covering Arafat

Nabeel Abraham

A symbol of the Reagan era was a poster with a caricature map of the world that purported to reflect the distortions and idiocies of Ronald Reagan's brain. The United States, according to Reagan's mental map, was hilariously exaggerated, with California dwarfing the other states. Much of the Third World was shrunk beyond recognition, while Nicaragua and Libya loomed menacingly large. What made the map funny was that the distortions were attributable to a single individual, who just happened to be running the country. But there might have been a lot less laughter had people sensed that the *New York Times* and other major media were trying to mold their minds into the likeness of Reagan's.

Every day the media shape our mental map of the world. It is not too difficult to spot government and media hype. Screaming headlines, graphic photos, endless commentaries, and the like tend to give the game away. What is not so easy to discern is when a story is being played down or suppressed. Coverage of Yasir Arafat's recent visit to Paris and Rome is a case in point.

In an early morning newscast on Thursday, April 5, National Public Radio (NPR) reported, without giving details, that the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had met in Paris with Jimmy Carter and French President Francois Mitterand, and that he would meet next with the Pope in Rome. NPR added that Arafat had offered to meet Israeli leader Shimon Peres.

News of Arafat Tucked Away

Turning to the *New York Times* on April 5, one discovered that such matters (in reality three separate stories) had been relegated to a four-paragraph wire-service story tucked away at the bottom of page five ("Carter Meets Arafat in Paris, Praises Him as Peacemaker"). Most readers probably passed over the story without giving it much thought, if they noticed it at all. The overall impression was that the story was pedestrian and unimportant; Carter's assessment of Arafat is not indicative of any major developments in the Middle East. This impression fits neatly in the *Times*'s longstanding ideological framework: The terrorist PLO along with most Arab states are responsible for frustrating something called the Middle East "peace process."

Clearly, the *New York Times* sought to minimize the Arafat-Carter-Mitterand meeting. Not unexpectedly, the paper avoided any followup stories, editorials, or commentaries, all in keeping with past practice.

The *Chicago Tribune* ran a paragraph-long wire-service story much like the *Times*'s, while the *Detroit Free Press* ignored it altogether. The *Washington Post* provided an interesting contrast. The paper ran a 19-column-inch story, but it was inexplicably buried on page A43 ("Carter, Arafat Meet on Middle East

Peace Plan," April 5, 1990). The story, written by the *Post*'s Paris correspondent, largely paralleled the wire services but was accompanied by an unflattering closeup photo of Carter sans Arafat. Of all the major dailies surveyed, only the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story along with a large photo of Arafat and Carter on page one ("Carter Talks to Arafat, Draws Israeli Rebuke," April 5).

From Paris, Arafat went to Rome, where he met with the Italian president and other government officials before his meeting with the Pope. During this time the wire services were humming with Arafat-related stories, as indicated by the sampling of headlines noted in the box below.

The *New York Times* boiled down all this and other related news to a single photo that ran on Saturday, April 7; there was no coverage of these matters on either the day before or after. (Coverage in the other papers varied, but was minimal overall.) The photo, which depicted Arafat clasping Pope John Paul's hand, was prominently featured on page A3.

The photo caption is of some interest. It was headlined, "Arafat Meets With Pope to Discuss Middle East." The cap-

Wide World Photos



Arafat and former President Jimmy Carter shaking hands after their meeting with French President Francois Mitterand.

Wire Service Stories Ignored

"Arafat Says He [is] Trying to Get Western Hostages Released," Reuters, Abu Dhabi, April 5 (2:30 EST).

"Arafat Says Solid Peres [Knesset] Majority Would Boost Peace Efforts," Reuters, Paris, April 5 (4:37 EST).

"Italy Gives Warm Welcome to Arafat After Israeli Protests," Reuters, Rome, April 5 (9:10 EST).

"Arafat Asks Arab Deputies to Vote for Peres," Reuters, Rome, April 5 (17:51 EST).

"Arafat Seeks Help in Drawing Israel to the Negotiating Table," AP, Vatican City, April 6 (6:39 PDT).

"Pope Receives Arafat and Urges Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations," AP, Vatican City, April 6 (6:39 PDT).

"Pope, Arafat Meet During Delicate Moment in Mideast Peace Process," AP, Vatican City, April 6 (12:44 PDT).

"Arafat: I Had Secret Contacts with Israeli Leaders," AP, Rome, April 6 (13:55 PDT). (This story was updated four times through April 7.)

"Monks Give Arafat Sainly Earth for Occupied Territories," Reuters, Assisi, Italy, April 6 (13:17 EST).

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tion below informed unsuspecting readers (i.e., readers relying entirely on the *Times* for their foreign news) simply that the Pope had met with Arafat for 20 minutes. It stated that the Pope "encouraged Mr. Arafat to seek dialogue in the Middle East peace process" and that Arafat told a TV interviewer of "having contacts" with Israeli leaders. Two days of news "fitted" into two sentences of print.

How Captions Mislead

The caption is misleading in two ways. It presupposes that Arafat needed to be "encouraged to seek dialogue." In the ideological world of the *New York Times*, Arafat is an incorrigible terrorist who rejects peace and therefore needs moral and political guidance. In the real world, Arafat and the mainstream PLO have long been part of an international consensus favoring a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, while Israel, the U.S., and the mainstream press led by the *Times* have been firmly rooted in the rejectionist camp.

But the caption is misleading in another, more direct way.

According to an AP story, "Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro said the Pope had agreed to meet Arafat to encourage 'any positive attitude' in the search for peace and especially to strengthen the will for dialogue as the only valid way to find adequate solutions for conflicts" (emphasis added). The somewhat long-winded statement at least presupposes a "positive attitude" on Arafat's part. And the wire service story was quite explicit that the Pope "urged Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate a settlement allowing them both to live in peace" (emphasis added); not the same as "encouraging Mr. Arafat to seek dialogue in the Middle East peace process" ("Pope Receives Arafat and Urges Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations," AP, April 6).

The world according to Ronald Reagan was infinitely more simple than the one recreated daily by the *New York Times*. In Reagan's world, countries expanded or contracted in size depending on how many times they were brought to his attention by his handlers. In the world of the *Times*, people, places, and events expand and contract according to a complicated ideological calculus. ●

Odds and Ends

Saluting the Admiral

Have local media forgotten how to report a story? Around here they have. We are *Zephyr*, a weekly public-access newspaper out in the great corn desert of Illinois. Although our staff is volunteer and our circulation less than 1,200 copies per week, we discovered an 800-pound-gorilla of a story and printed it.

Last December 4, the Admiral refrigerator manufacturing plant in Galesburg, Illinois, had a hose blow at two in the morning. The hose contained a chemical substance, methylene bisphenyl isocyanate (MDI), used in the insulation of the refrigerators that they manufacture here. Two hundred gallons of MDI, which emits a toxic gas into the air, soaked the foaming lines. Although isocyanates are extremely irritating to lung tissues (cousin to the poisonous gas released at Bhopal), workers were not evacuated. When the day shift arrived, they were urged to work in, on, and around the toxic substance as well.

The workers balked. One of them called the fire department, and another called the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), both workers showing more common sense than company supervisors. The mess caused by the spill was finally cleaned up, but the problems had only begun.

According to the chairperson of the union safety committee, Mike Norville, more than 100 workers have reported breathing problems since the spill, but OSHA has been sitting on the shoulders of the Admiral management, doing little to address the problem of workers' sickness.

Beginning on March 15, 1990, the *Zephyr* ran a five-week series on the spill and other work hazards at the plant. As a result, factory management stonewalled our attempts to expose

the affair and dragged employees into their offices for interrogation, according to those we interviewed for the series. They also reportedly attempted to rig the air-sampling procedures when a federal inspection team arrived from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health office in Cincinnati, trying everything in their power to put a lid on the situation.

The factory there has been cited for 102 serious OSHA violations in the last three years. A similar plant, run by Admiral's competitor, Whirlpool, has had only *one* such citation in the same time period.

The reaction of the community was mixed. Since the Maytag Corporation, which owns the Admiral plant, is the biggest employer in town, with 20 percent of the local work force, the *Zephyr* took a lot of heat from the business community. One Admiral executive took it upon himself to threaten our advertisers, some of whom subsequently heeded those threats. Since Galesburg is a small town, the over-the-fence propaganda machine was put into full gear, vilifying us without mercy.

But the workers remained solidly in our corner, and we continued to write articles supporting their cause. One union official quoted in the first story said, "It was kind of like you were out there working next to us."

The response of other area media was appalling. At first we could not believe what was happening. When the story appeared, it was met with a stunned silence. Television stations did pitifully weak stories, stealing a lot of their material from *Zephyr* articles. The *Galesburg Register-Mail*, the local daily, would not touch the real story, nor would the *Peoria Journal-Star*. In late March, they finally reported on the incident, burying re-written OSHA and Admiral press releases on their inner pages.

It soon became obvious that there were business interests involved that prevented other reporters from covering the story. Nobody but the *Zephyr* was going to go after the biggest employer in town. The *Journal-Star* was in the process of purchasing the *Register-Mail*, which had just printed a two-section, 40-page special edition celebrating the factory's fortieth anniversary.

Needless to say, none of the problems was mentioned. The special edition was chock-full of advertising, proving once and for all what motivates the *Register-Mail* to compromise itself. News suppression, information distortion, and corporate intimidation are facts of life around here. Add to that a profound arrogance on behalf of local reporters and editors, coupled with mind-boggling laziness, and you get the picture.

As a public-access newspaper, *Zephyr* has broken the corporate stranglehold on the local media by promising to print almost anything of significance that comes our way. You can do the same. Buy yourself a computer and spread the word. If you are tired of what you are reading in your local paper, you are just going to have to do it yourself.

— Todd Moore

OSHA Deaths Uncovered

April 28 is Workers Memorial Day, a day of mourning for the thousands of workers killed every year on the job. This year workers gathered in Gramercy Park in remembrance of the Con Edison workers who died there last year. While reporters from the *New York Times*, the *New York Post*, and two local television stations were on the scene, none carried the story.

Labor issues — even worker deaths — are not a media priority. The Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) released a report last Workers Memorial Day (“Occupational Safety and Health: 7 Critical Issues for the 1990s” [Washington: BNA, 1989]) revealing the startling dimensions of job injuries and deaths and that work-related deaths only rarely lead to prosecutions. It was carried on the AP business wire and picked up by many trade magazines and the *Washington Post*. The *Wall Street Journal* ran a small story on April 28, but the *Times* never touched it.

According to the report, since 1980, only 30 cases of job fatalities were turned over by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to federal authorities, only four of those were prosecuted, and no corporate official was imprisoned (although there have been a handful of successful state prosecutions). A House Committee on Government Operations report of October 1988, “Getting Away With Murder in the Workplace: OSHA’s Nonuse of Criminal Penalties for Safety Violations,” was the basis for some of BNA’s conclusions (BNA Report, Appendix A).

Official estimates place the number of on-the-job worker deaths at 7,000 to 11,000 per year (BNA Report, p. A-8), but independent estimates are twice as high. Whatever the mortality rate, employers are simply not being penalized. The BNA Report indicates that this is partially due to limited finances and partly to an unwillingness by federal prosecutors to handle such cases. Furthermore, the Bush administration cut \$200,000 from the budget for the prosecution of companies responsible for workers’ deaths, money which was used to prosecute violations of federal obscenity laws (BNA Report, p. 23). Who says Jerry Falwell doesn’t have a hold on the government’s priorities?

— Kristina Stockwood

Protecting the Israeli Lobby

On May 3, 1990, Michael Goland, a pro-Israeli political donor and manipulator, was convicted in Los Angeles of an especially ugly sabotaging of the 1986 senatorial election campaign of conservative Republican Ed Zschau, who ran against Senator Alan Cranston. The news account of this case — in which Goland supported a third-party conservative to draw votes away from Zschau — was exceedingly distorted in the *New York Times*.

An article on the same case in the *Wall Street Journal*, by John Fialka, appeared on May 7 under the title, “Pro-Israel Political Donor Is Convicted of Trying to Sabotage Senate Campaign” (p. A16). The *Times* article by Richard Berke, which appeared one day later on page A17, is entitled, “Cranston Backer Guilty in Campaign Finance Case.”

The *Times* keeps the Israeli connection out of the title, featuring instead the unfortunate Cranston, although the text of the article notes that there is no evidence that Cranston was aware of Goland’s sabotage effort. Moreover, the overall evidence indicates that Israeli interests — not those of Cranston — were the driving force in Goland’s activities. In addition, the *Wall Street Journal* points out that during the height of the Cranston-Zschau campaign, Goland was “in almost daily contact with officials of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a Washington-based group that lobbies on behalf of Israel.” This group and Goland’s connection to it are unmentioned in the *Times* article.

Although the *Times* article refers to Goland’s expensive 1984 campaign to unseat Senator Charles Percy of Illinois, the *Wall Street Journal* links that campaign to other Goland activities, and his bullying qualities. It quoted a witness who claimed that Goland threatened a number of senators in connection with the 1985 arms sale to Saudi Arabia, telling them: “If you vote for this arms deal, I will do to you what I did to Charles Percy in 1984.”

The *Times* played down the nature of Goland’s operation against Zschau in 1986, stating only briefly that Goland gave money to “an independent who sought Mr. Cranston’s Senate seat,” and that a prosecutor contended that he had violated the election laws “by recruiting friends and associates to give money” to a rival of Zschau. The *Wall Street Journal* offers more detail, stating that “According to testimony in the case, Mr. Goland used a former Republican National Committee staff worker and an anti-abortion lobbyist in an underground campaign to discredit the conservative credentials of former U.S. Rep. Ed Zschau.... [Goland] funneled his company’s money through business acquaintances and a pro-Israel political action committee. The recipients included an ultra-right, anti-Zionist, third-party candidate, Edward B. Vallen, who withdrew votes from Mr. Zschau.”

Thus the *Times* suppresses not only the participation of the pro-Israeli PAC, but also the fact that Goland gave money to an anti-Zionist extremist to take votes from Zschau, a form of political deviousness that the *Times* apparently does not want attached to the activities of the Israeli lobby.

— Edward S. Herman

Todd Moore is the editor of *Zephyr*, P.O. Box 1, Galesburg, IL 61402.

Much Ado About Vietnam

The Monday, April 30, 1990, issue of the *New York Times* offers a good lesson on how to create a news story out of thin air. Seth Mydans's article entitled "After 15 Years Thieu and Ky Offer to Help Bring Down Hanoi's Rule," shows how a front-page *Times* story can be manufactured from innuendo, hearsay, and outright lies.

Traditionally, news is based on some important event or fact. This particular story opens with the statement that "Fifteen years after the fall of Saigon, the two most prominent former leaders of South Vietnam are becoming active again." It continues, "They have recently begun touring ... seeking to build a personal following as they agitate for changes in Vietnam." This is news? It is telling that on the fifteenth anniversary of the U.S. exit from Vietnam, this is the best the *New York Times* could come up with.

Mydans uses the anniversary as a hook to track down Thieu in Thailand and Ky in Paris and interview the former politicians, thereby creating a story out of a non-event. The statement that these are the two most prominent former leaders of South Vietnam is more than misleading. They are hardly prominent as national leaders but rather as mercenaries for the French colonial regime, then as puppets serving a U.S. invading army in its murderous campaign of pacification. Officials of the Ky-Thieu government regularly acknowledged their inability to compete with the National Liberation Front on a purely political basis, which was the reason for their reliance on intense repression. The regime was also notable for corruption, including the participation by high officials in the drug trade (Ky prominent among them).

Well aware of the questionable character of his protagonists, Mydans is obliged to acknowledge that "Their activities have raised some eyebrows among some overseas Vietnamese who question the credibility of the leaders." Nonetheless, Mydans fails to explain why they are suspect, yet proceeds to quote their lies.

"The whole people of Vietnam are ready to stand up against the oppressor and to launch a national revolution," he quotes Thieu. As no other source supporting such a statement is cited, and Thieu has not set foot in Vietnam since its "fall" (as Mydans terms it; others call it "liberation"), one is left wondering how Mr. Thieu knows what is in the hearts and minds of the "whole people" of Vietnam.

Mydans continues giving credence to these unsubstantiated comments, writing, "Mr. Thieu described a number of factors that he argued could touch off an uprising in Vietnam, including divisions in the Communist Party and the military and tensions between officials from the northern and southern parts of the country." Thieu proclaimed, as if it were fact, "Sooner or later there will be an explosion."

There you have it. You too can write a front-page *New York Times* article. Just interview two discredited former leaders of a country whose government the U.S. is chomping at the bit to



U.S. puppets, Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, left, and Premier Nguyen Cao Ky, seeing off another U.S. puppet, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Saigon airport, 1967.

depose. Then quote whatever they say that gives the impression that the country is on the verge of falling apart.

— Karen Ranucci

How Paul Lewis Covers UNESCO

Edward S. Herman

When the Reagan administration pulled the United States out of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at the end of 1984, the mainstream press, including the *New York Times*, cooperated wholeheartedly. They adopted the U.S. charges against UNESCO as the truth and added other critics' supportive claims and data without any analysis. Alternative views were ignored, along with incompatible facts.

The main State Department charges were that UNESCO was politicized and mismanaged, and that it threatened the free flow of information. One alternative perspective that could have been presented was that UNESCO-bashing by the government reflected a shift in policy away from support of multilateral institutions to unilateralism, based on its rightwing ideology and narrowly self-serving aggressiveness. In fact, many Third World spokespersons argued that the untrammelled free flow of advertisements, products, and information served the self-interest of the western media and other multinational corporations while threatening the values, cultural integrity, and economic and political independence of less-developed countries.

Lewis's Selectivity

In 22 articles on the U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO published in the *Times* between 1984 and 1985, Paul Lewis never mentioned the "U.N.-bashing/rightwing ideology" argument and

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only once pointed out in passing the Third World perspective, which he described as portraying an alleged threat. The idea that the western version of the free flow of information reflected economic self-interest was never suggested by Lewis. Nor did he ever point out the contradiction and hypocrisy in the West's sanctimonious horror at the threat of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) while the Reagan administration was restricting the flow of information between the United States and Cuba (among others) and while both Reagan and Thatcher were assaulting the free flow of information at home. Nor did Lewis provide background information relevant to the charge of UNESCO's "politicization." He never defined the word, nor did he mention any of the numerous cases of U.S. manipulation of UNESCO for political purposes (including the introduction of FBI screening of U.S. citizens applying for, and already on, U.N. organization staffs during the Truman-McCarthy era).

Lewis's close adherence to the U.S. government's premises and frames of reference has never faltered. A dramatic illustration occurred in 1987 when the United States was trying to press the U.N. Human Rights Commission to focus on Cuba. The U.S. had mounted a major effort over several years to have Cuba investigated and condemned for human rights abuses. At the same time, during the Reagan years the U.S. regularly fought against the condemnation of allies like Argentina, Chile, and South Africa. This would appear to be a highly political agenda, representing Reagan priorities. Lewis interpreted this as "an American campaign to make the United Nations Human Rights Commission a less political [*sic*] and more effective watchdog against oppressive governments..."



Paul Lewis

(this is his opening line in "U.N. Human Rights Group Faces a Key Test," March 7, 1987). He presented without comment the government's claim that it seeks to end a "double standard." This claim would be more convincing if the Reaganites had departed even slightly from their own agenda, which they did not do.

European establishment newspapers interpreted the Reagan campaign against Cuba as a blatant politicization—for example, *El Pais* in Spain headed its article on the subject, "Uneasiness in the U.N. Human Rights Commission About the Politicization of the Cuban Case" (March 7, 1987). But Paul Lewis stuck to the U.S. government's line like a patriotic bulldog. Politicization is the support of policies which my government opposes.

Lewis returned to the UNESCO issue on September 17, 1989 ("Unesco Chief About to Face a Showdown"), stimulated by the fact that the UNESCO General Conference was about to vote on a multiyear budget. The issue as formulated by Paul Lewis was whether the new Director-General, Federico Mayor Zaragoza, would be able to do enough to convince the U.S., Great Britain, and Singapore to return to the fold. As in his articles of 1984 and 1985, Lewis never questioned the validity of the original charges and the assumption that they explain the exits from UNESCO. He referred again to the NWICO as the "old goal" of UNESCO, and said, "Nothing contributed more to the American decision to leave Unesco than its espousal of such an order, backed by Communist countries and leftist third-world governments and strongly supported by Mr. M'Bow." The NWICO, he said, "seemed an unacceptable attempt to legitimize censorship by establishing the right of governments to tamper with the free flow of information to promote national aims...."

Lies About NWICO

All through the period of withdrawal, Lewis kept repeating that "UNESCO" espoused NWICO, while UNESCO officials kept writing to the *Times* that this was a falsification: that while some individual members supported it, UNESCO as an organization had never done so, and that, furthermore, no proposal for licensing journalists or approving censorship had ever been put up for a vote, let alone passed. In fact, the organization had accepted unanimously the MacBride Report, which states explicitly that censorship "should be abolished" (Recommendation 56). The U.S. delegate voted in favor of the MacBride Report. These facts had no impact on Paul Lewis or the *New York Times* in the earlier years (see "The Non-Correctability of Error," in William Preston, Jr., Edward S. Herman, and Herbert I. Schiller, *Hope and Folly* [prepared by and available from the Institute for Media Analysis] [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1989], pp. 273-277). They continue in 1990 to repeat the false statement that UNESCO favors the NWICO and censorship. In an article on May 6, 1990, Lewis even extends his misrepresentations to the U.N. as a whole, with "its call" for a NWICO "one of the most debated ideas that the *United Nations* has ever put forward..." ("Hotly Contested Press Proposal Fades in UN," sec. 1, p. 12, emphasis added).

Computerized Propaganda Formula on NWICO

Paul Lewis's formula on the NWICO is also repeated by his *Times* colleagues in rote fashion, as if this biased version was pulled out of a computer (see William H. Schaap's account of a similar process in connection with the Panama Canal, in "Pride of Authorship, 'Gringo Interference,' and the Panama Canal," *Lies Of Our Times*, January 1990, p. 3). Youssef M. Ibrahim writes that "The post [head of UNESCO] is extremely sensitive, particularly in view of the controversy that has surrounded Unesco's repeated attempts over the years to formulate a new world information order, a move Western critics describe as a disguised attempt to impose press censorship" ("Unesco in Uproar as Chief Proposes Overhaul," March 14, 1990, p. A13). Characteristically, "Western critics" are confined to critics of UNESCO; those who would correct the error on UNESCO's alleged sponsorship that Ibrahim repeats once again, and his biased interpretation of the NWICO, are ignored.

Robert Pear accomplishes the same result in his familiar fashion: He simply quotes the State Department (and refers to other "Western critics" who agree), that under the NWICO "freedom of the press and freedom of expression are balanced against the desires of governments to control the flow of information to and from their citizens" ("U.S. Won't Rejoin Unesco, Deriding Agency as Inept," April 17, 1990, p. A1). This is the same version of the issue that Paul Lewis has been reiterating over the years.

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The *Times's* Own Paper Mills

Doug Henwood

While our newspapers are gleefully reporting environmental disasters in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, they are decidedly more reticent about examining the mess in their own backyard — not merely in the U.S. itself (the globe's champion polluter), but in their own industry.

The production of newsprint requires the sacrifice of innumerable trees and results in extensive air and water pollution. But you would have to search long and hard for an exploration of this story in our media. A search of the National Newspaper Index (NNI), a database that covers the *New York Times*, four other major papers, and several wire services, from 1979 to mid-

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May 1990, reveals only a handful of stories about the matter. According to the NNI, of the 803,208 *Times* articles indexed by NNI in the last 11 years, there have been exactly seven about the paper industry's dirty habits. None of them focused specifically on newsprint.

A cynic might conclude that this lack of curiosity is a result of the *Times's* appetite for newsprint. But the paper's self-interest extends deeper than mere consumption: Like most newspaper companies, it also produces vast quantities of newsprint. The *Times's* corporate parent has a 49-percent interest in three Canadian paper mills (two in Quebec, one in Ontario) and an 80-percent interest in a Maine mill. Together, the mills produce almost one million tons of newsprint a year.

Note that, unlike the departed Eastern European regimes, which polluted their own countries, the *Times* does most of its environmental damage in Canada. This export of pollution is, of course, further proof of the natural superiority of capitalism. Canadians find this irritating, another matter the *Times* rarely deigns to report. In fact, according to NNI, the *Times* has run four times as many stories about Brazil's disappearing forests as they have about Canada's. It is so much easier to demand that Brazil mend its ways than to ask Times Company chair Punch Sulzberger to mend his.

David J. Cross / Impact Visuals



A controversial "clearcut" on a steep slope in Six Rivers National Forest, California. The road, which was put in to expedite timber cutting, crossed sacred Indian lands, and was the subject of a successful lawsuit by environmental groups and Indian tribes against the Forest Service.

Lies Of Our Times
145 West 4th Street
New York, NY 10012

SECOND CLASS